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Ministry of Education

ABORIGINAL EDUCATION AGREEMENT HELPS SAANICH STUDENTS

VICTORIA – Community Services Minister Ida Chong and Advanced Education Minister Murray Coell joined Aboriginal leaders, officials from the Saanich school district and community partners today to sign an Aboriginal education enhancement agreement to improve Aboriginal student performance.

"This new agreement is an important step for Saanich Aboriginal students," said Chong. "Over half of the school districts in B.C. have now signed Aboriginal education enhancement agreements and we are starting to see the results for learners."

"This will have positive effects across the Saanich school district," said Coell. "By helping the overall school system to focus on Aboriginal achievement and cultural understanding, enhancement agreements are helping students achieve their best."

The Saanich school district works closely with the Saanich Indian school board and community agencies to build effective programs for local First Nations, Métis and other Aboriginal students. This enhancement agreement builds on that relationship with four specific goals in the areas of academics, language and culture, personal development and positive learning environments. The goals are to improve:

- Knowledge of Aboriginal history, culture, values and language for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students;
- Sense of belonging for Aboriginal students;
- Mutual respect, trust and co-operation among all students; and
- Successful transitions of Aboriginal students to post-secondary education and/or the world of work.

"Aboriginal education enhancement agreements are just one way government is working to improve outcomes for our Aboriginal students," said Education Minister Shirley Bond. "We know that by incorporating Aboriginal history and culture into the classroom, we will improve student achievement for all learners."

The Saanich school district worked closely with local Aboriginal communities and the Ministry of Education to develop the enhancement agreement and to identify strategies to help reach the goals of the agreement. The strategies include:

- Integrating use of Aboriginal content in the curricula for all students;
- Collaborating with community partners to build a spectrum of supports for Aboriginal students;
- Encouraging Aboriginal teachers and support staff to take advantage of Aboriginal-focused training; and
- Building improved supports for Aboriginal students moving from the school to post secondary learning.

There are 498 Aboriginal students learning within both the Saanich and Saanich Indian school boards this year. The district serves the WSANEC peoples, including the Pauquachin, Tsartlip, Tseycum, and Tsawout First Nations, and other Métis and Inuit students.

"This education enhancement agreement has built additional opportunities to support the WSANEC, other First Nations, Métis and Inuit students in our district," said Saanich Board of Education chair MaryLynne Rimer. "As we created the agreement, a number of new community partners provided valuable input and will continue to help us

support student achievement." 2008-05239

"It's all about helping our students do the best they can," said Saanich Indian School board chair and Pauquachin Chief Bruce Underwood. "If we are going to help our students to reach higher, we have to work together. This agreement will aid that process."

Thirty-eight B.C. school districts have signed Aboriginal education enhancement agreements to date. These agreements support the Province's Pacific Leadership Agenda to build new relationships with First Nations, and have been successful in helping school districts close gaps in Aboriginal education.

With enhancement agreements in place, New Westminster's Aboriginal completion rate went from only 18 per cent to 39 per cent in only two years and Fort Nelson's Aboriginal completion rate went up 22 per cent, from 62 to 84 per cent.

The Province is also supporting Aboriginal students with new education options like the English 12 First Peoples course and the passage of the First Nations Education Act in November 2007, supporting First Nations student achievement and lifelong learning.

The Province is investing an estimated $51.1 million a year – $1,014 per student – for Aboriginal education in 2007-08. The funds are used to support Aboriginal language and culture programs, Aboriginal support service programs, and other localized Aboriginal education programs.

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